

**PETER FRY**  
**26/06/2014**

**Interviewer:** Napheas Akhter

**Interviewer:** I  
**Respondent:** R

00:00 I My name is Nafese Akhtar, today I'm speaking with Mr Peter Fry who was born in 1939 in Acocks Green. Please can you tell me about your background?

00:22 R Well as you've just said I was born in Acocks Green but erm my parents owned this house and I was brought back to this house erm as a new born infant, and I lived in this house right the way through until I got married in 1966 and erm they erm had many happy years here.

00:54 I Can you tell me a bit about your parents?

00:59 R Yes my father was an industrial chemist working with Joseph Lucas, who during the war were ammunitions, so he never got called up for military service as he was in a reserved occupation and my mother was erm a dress maker who prior to me coming along and my brothers, had worked at Rackham's in the City of Birmingham.

01:27 I What are your memories of the area and house that you lived in?

01:32 R Er when my parents moved into the house, they rented it to start with, they didn't actually start buying the house until the war's end, er, when it was more fashionable to purchase properties. But the house was new, the area was farm land which has been developed in 1938 when my parents moved in. I can remember horses coming up to the bottom of the garden during the war years and there was a pigsty down towards the end of the road which all the children around here used to like going down to watch the pigs being slopped out.

02:29 I Please can you tell me about your infant school?

02:34 R Yea, I went to a small private school Cole Bank High School, and the first siting of that school was at the Methodist church on the corner of York Road and Stratford Road, Hall Green. And we were there for a short period before moving to what is now the United Reformed Church in Etwall Road, Hall Green and then subsequently to what was St Cadoc's church is now St Peter's Church from which I passed my Eleven Plus and went to secondary school at Moseley Grammar School.

- 03:24 I Can you tell me a bit about your lessons, your teachers and friends at infant school?
- 03:34 R Erm yes, because of the distance from here, the school day was nine til twelve in the morning and two til half past three in the afternoon. My mother used to walk me to a friend's house in Sarehole Road and then I went up to school with my friends who lived there and then my mother collected us at lunchtime, brought us home, we had lunch and er we walked all the way back up to school. How my mother coped in those days I just don't know cos we hadn't got a car, there was no direct bus route to take us, but life was totally different in those days.
- 04:33 I Did you have a best friend?
- 04:36 R Not particularly, I've never really had a best friend, I've always had friends or acquaintances who I've been pally with and played with. Obviously children round this little area here in Colbourne Road, we were pretty close and we spent hours playing out in the Dingles at the bottom of the garden, erm, but I didn't have close friends that I would say long term other than the girl who lived next door, who was an only child, three months older than myself, and we grew up as brother and sister. She married a French man at Birmingham Oratory in 1961 and I was one of the ushers at her wedding and we always consider ourselves brother and sister, and we even seventy five years on we're still in contact with each other, in fact I've got to phone her up in a little while because her husband has just gone into hospital in Claremont Farrell and I need to find out how she is.
- 06:04 I Can you tell me a little bit more about life after school hours and school holidays?
- 06:14 R Erm well as I've just said, with the Dingles at the bottom of the garden and the river, we spent hours playing and fishing in the river, it just seemed natural. It was hindered during the war years because I can remember German bombers coming up what is now the north Warwickshire railway and bombing the bridges on the way into the industrial centre of Birmingham, and there's a block of shops in Highfield Road that got bombed and flattened, they went for the bridge at the bottom of Robin Hood Lane and the bomb landed in the Dingles, doing damage to the houses in Cole Valley Road. Erm I can't remember damage up towards Hall Green Station on the Stratford Road, but the German bombers used to use the railway as a track to go through Tyseley and up to bomb the centre of Birmingham where obviously there was an awful lot of bomb damage.
- 07:34 I Can you tell us about your feelings about the bombing and all the damage that was happening?

07:44 R Well I was only five/six when the war ended so you don't remember an awful lot back to those days. What I can remember is the nights that I spent in an air raid shelter, when the German bombers were coming through, and they on one occasion my mother and I had to cower in the corner of the kitchen because we couldn't get out of our house quick enough, but generally those at the war years, those were the memories, other than, I can remember that when both my brothers were born and they were born in this house, not in a nursing home, I can remember my father taking me out and walking me through the Dingles and round Trifford Park and then when we came home there was the baby upstairs.

08:53 I Please can you tell me about your secondary school?

08:59 R Yea I passed Eleven Plus and went to Moseley Grammar School, a bit of trepidation there because, there was a bigger age gap I should say when I went there, and you'd got sixth formers who were "adults" and prefects which I hadn't experienced before, so you generally had to be on your best behaviour, and I think there was a little bit of trepidation because you were going into a completely new, strange atmosphere and I think that you have a different sort of reaction when you're eleven to the one that you had when you were five. You understand things a little bit better so there was apprehension I suppose as to what to expect. But, no we went from a school where you had one teacher all day, to actually being on the move. What I do remember is that we were all issued with a set of books for all the subjects that we were doing which were kept in our desks, in the classroom, and I don't think that that is relevant to today's society because I know that my grandchildren when they were going to school, they had to take the books from home with them, and so it's a totally different ball game in 2014 to what it was in 1951/54.

11:00 I At secondary school age, what were the things that you did after school or in the holidays?

11:07 R Well I found rugby when I went to secondary school, I played rugby for my house during my early secondary school years, but I ultimately found cross country, and I did four years cross country for the school for which I got my colours. Outside school, I'd been a member of the junior church choir at what was Hall Green Parish Church, which is now the Church of the Ascension, and I was the first cross bearer to carry a cross in that church, on the occasion of its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1954 which was when the name was changed from Hall Green Parish Church to the Church of the Ascension. At that time I was head choir boy at the daughter church of St Michael's and I'd also when I went to secondary school I got inveigled into the school choir and from then I went into the City of Birmingham Childrens Choir which I was in for a couple of years.

12:54 I As you came towards the end of secondary school, can you tell me of your

expectations and hopes?

13:03 R Well obviously your prime objective is to find a job. My father was an industrial chemist and I'd spent some of my school holidays going down and visiting the laboratory where he worked and I think he'd got aspirations that I might follow him into that line of work. I found that maths was one of my favourite subjects at school and that led me into looking at jobs in the finance world, and after a couple of interviews, I was accepted into the Westminster Bank which I joined and which was my sole job for my career, I went, I stayed with the bank right the way through until I got an early retirement package at the age of fifty one and that took me through the changes of Westminster Bank being absorbed or bought or merged with the National District Bank, but I came out, I got my retirement package just before the takeover by the Royal Bank of Scotland.

14:38 I Can you describe a day at work?

14:44 R Well it depends which end of your career you want to talk about. I can remember the first day of work, when I'd joined Westminster bank in Colmore Row in the centre of Birmingham, and I was put onto the post desk which was the junior job in the office, and part of that also included going over to do the local clearing of cheques between the Birmingham banks which was done at the bank of England, and generally it was just general junior duties of post and that sort of thing. You progressed with experience onto machining, and I had delight in, or should I say shock, a few years later in actually seeing one of the burroughs machines that I'd used when I started doing my machine work at Westminster Bank actually in a museum and I didn't consider that I was that old. But having stayed with the bank right the way through my career, I worked through the various jobs and I moved up from an office junior right the way through to junior management which is where I finished off as an Administration Manager in the National Westminster Bank in Kings Heath in Birmingham, and erm, I generally enjoyed my job, there were pressures but you had to learn to cope with those.

16:50 I Can you tell me about some of the people that were important to you after you left school?

17:00 R After I left school? Erm well the nature of banking is that you move around, well we were moved between branches every three/four years, so I referred earlier to not having any deep friendships throughout life. I was fortunate in that I'd stayed in Birmingham and I wasn't moved around and didn't have to move house every two or three years, which happens to some people, but because you were moving around so frequently, you never really had the time to make close binding friendships. You had friendships obviously, but I'd got outside interests which didn't include them, and so, you know the close friendships never came about. I did my National Service, I was called up in

1959, right at the backend of the National Service era, and I did eighteen months with the Royal Air force. That was a strange experience for me because it was the first time that I'd actually left home and been responsible for looking after myself. But then all the young men who were called up with you and regulars were in the same boat, and so you found that there were people from all walks of life who, probably in civilian life, you wouldn't have had anything to do with, but because you were all being thrown into a pile so to speak, there was us and them with the NCO's and if you didn't bind together, you know you were in trouble, so I had eighteen months with the Royal Air Force which was interesting, it was interesting. I got kitted out at Caddington in Bedfordshire which is a balloon centre over which I understand there's a no flying zone, so god knows what was going on inside there, and then I had the peculiar experience of being on a troop train through New Street Station, my home city on the way to Bridgnorth where I did my basic training, and then I moved up to my permanent camp in Bomber Command in Lincolnshire and thoroughly enjoyed it, made a different person of me, made a different person of me.

20:17 I Can you tell me about your views of your National Service experience?

20:24 R Well I just said that I came out a different person. I believe that a lot of the problems of today's youngsters could be alleviated with some form of National Service or some form of discipline because, the way that it's affected me and a lot of people around me, I think was to the individual's benefit. I was in charge of the camp post room, I was what the Royal Air Force classed as a clerk postal, erm we had a civilian post office outside the camp gates so I didn't have stamps or I didn't handle money, but all the mail from married quarters on the camp and the parcels etc. for all the personnel on the camp were handled through my office. So it gave me a degree of responsibility which had hither to been missing, and this is really where I felt that I gained a big benefit from actually going in and doing National Service, albeit inevitably, a lot of people say that it's a big hole in their career that they could have done without, but it's horses for courses. You've got to do it, you make the most of it while you can and that's what I did.

22:16 I I'd like you to talk a bit about your wedding day if you would please.

22:22 R Well I can go to the build up to that. When I came out from doing my National Service, I joined my old boys, old Moseley and played rugby for the club, and it was there at one of our Saturday shindigs that I met Sylvia, and after two years "courtship" we got married at St Michael's Church, Bartley Green on the Saturday and the peculiar thing about weddings in those days as against certainly my sons weddings in latter years was that we weren't flush with money, we had a buffet reception in the church hall alongside the church and at half past three, Sylvia and I left the reception, never to be seen again, as we were on our way to honeymoon and I'd got a meal booked in a hotel in the Lake District for half past seven. That seems to be totally

different to what happens in 2000, well in 1990's when my two boys got married, because they all have evening do's now and I don't understand it, I don't understand it.

24:12 I How did life change for you after marriage?

24:18 R Well obviously it was a big change because, having lived with my parents right the way through til I was twenty seven, all of a sudden I found myself out in the big wide world with a young wife, and we got the happy job, of setting up home together. We initially, because I thought that the bank might move me from Birmingham, we initially rented a flat for twelve months in Moseley, and we were contemplating family at the end of that twelve months, and I approached the bank and said was it their intention to move me, because I wanted to buy my own house, and they then said that to go ahead and buy a house, which pre-empted the bank in moving me within the Birmingham area as against moving to another part of the country. Erm the family came along and subsequent moves from by the bank were also within the Birmingham area so, I never moved away from Birmingham, never moved away from Birmingham. The two boys were educated at Chilcote School in Hall Green and both of them eventually passed the Eleven Plus and went to King Edwards School, Five Ways, and that prompted me then to tell the bank that I didn't want to move away from Birmingham to disturb their education, which I thought was far more important than my career. I was big enough and ugly enough to look after myself, and I knew pretty much the route that the bank were going to take and I didn't feel that you had, well I suppose you did, but I didn't make moves to develop a career along any lines that I thought of cos I knew that I'd got a safe job and I knew pretty much what was mapped out for me so I didn't really have to think that much about it.

27:18 I Please can you tell me about where your children were born?

27:24 R Yea my one son was born in Solihull, in Solihull Maternity Hospital, and the other one was born at home in Kedleston Road, Hall Green and that's where we lived for thirteen years, twelve years, from 1967 to 79, which is when I bought this house from my parents and "came back home".

28:02 I Can you tell me about some of the family celebrations that you had?

28:13 R Errrr, well Sylvia and I have celebrated our silver wedding, we've celebrated our ruby wedding and, we've been around various places where we've celebrated, our ruby wedding anniversary, we went out on the Eastern and Oriental Railway from Bangkok down to Singapore, and, stayed a couple of nights in Raffles Hotel which was a dream in a manner of speaking because, we'd both been into Singapore on previous occasions. Once we'd been taken up into the Long Bar, at Raffles which is an experience in itself, and never dreaming that we'd even go back there, the second time we went back there we went and had a cup of tea in the restaurant, never dreaming that we'd

ever go back up, or could afford to go back and actually stay at Raffles, and then on this occasion we came back and stayed at Raffles. And we've had occasion, or at least I've had occasion, to celebrate my birthdays in Switzerland over a number of years which is nice, but yea, and I suppose seeing the children married. My eldest son got married here at St Peters in Hall Green and my young son got married down in Bristol to a girl he met in the Yukon and those occasions are very memorable, and happy occasions. In fact I think Sylvia and I are extremely lucky that we have a very close knit family and both the daughters in law who came in to a virtually all male household have fitted in extremely well, they get on well together. Even to the point where we still have family holidays, which again is a peculiarity I think in the modern idiom.

31:02 I Religion seems to be important to you.

31:07 R Yes I was, going right the way back as I said earlier on, I was in the junior church choir at Hall Green Parish Church in the late forties/early fifties. I was in the senior choir at St Michael's which was the daughter church of the Ascension, and yea religion has played a big part in my life. Erm I can't say that I'm happy with a lot of the changes that they've made to the church services in the Church of England trying to be all things to all people, which we all know just can't happen, so I found that I moved a little bit away from the church for those reasons, but my father was a free mason and I joined Free Masonry in 1968, and I found everything that I would have got from church from a moral and ethical point of view, very relevant in Free Masonry. To be a Free Mason you've got to believe in a supreme being which is the same as being a member of a religion be it Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Judaism, and in fact I sit in lodge with Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and we all get on well together and I well remember my father saying when I went into Free Masonry "if all men were free masons there'd be no wars because it instills in the individual a degree of tolerance and if you can work together in harmony inside a masonic lodge, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to work with that harmony outside."

33:50 I Can you tell me a little bit about how health services have changed?

33:59 R Not really, because in all honesty, I went for a medical check when I was forty two as part of a bank exercise for flu injections, erm and prior to that I hadn't been to see my GP, it must be for about twenty/twenty five years, so he wouldn't have known who I was and I certainly wouldn't have recognised him. But I've been under regular checks since I was forty two, which is some thirty years ago now when I think about it, and I've always had a favourable opinion of the National Health Service. I can't, I won't criticise it, I've had GP's who I've had the upmost confidence in, all through those years, my current GP is a cautious chap, and he has referred me on a couple of occasions for treatment at a very early stage when he felt fit, the latest being which resulted in me having my prostate out in 2009 which is five years ago,

and all the periodic checks that I've had since then have shown no recurrence of any prostate cancer, so yea I'm lucky, I'm lucky to have had that, otherwise I probably wouldn't be here by now.

35:58 I You enjoy going for walks and you've enjoyed sport do you still... You mentioned that you enjoyed rugby as a child and a young man, do you still have any involvement in sport?

36:22 R Ere yes definitely, erm when my two sons were at King Edwards Five Ways, both of them showed a certain amount of sporting prowess and they both ended up playing rugby for the school, and also for Worcester School Boys, which was a big thrill for me and I spent many happy Saturdays traveling with them when they were playing for school matches. Subsequently and currently, I'm a member of, a social member, of Moseley Rugby Club which is now sited on Billesley Common which is just at the end of the road and I thoroughly enjoy going up there on Saturdays, to the championship matches, and on occasion, both my sons are with me and so we can make it a bit of a lads out occasion and go for a pint together.

37:34 I Would you go for a meal together? I want to ask how food has changed over the years.

37:47 R Well, I mean yes we do go out, we do go because we still have family holidays and we eat together. Erm both my sons families come round and dine with us here, and we on occasion go and dine with them. Now if you're talking about how food has changed over the years, you're taking me back to rationing, during the war. And there's one thing that always, it don't niggle in my mind but it puzzles me, that the children or the youngsters today don't appear to have the same respect for food that I was instilled in, when I was growing up, because I can remember that sweets were on the ration. My father would go and get the sweets on the Saturday morning, and he'd come back and he'd get his penknife out and he'd open a mars bar up and he'd cut the end off a mars bar, cut it into two, and that was my sweet ration for the Saturday, and that mars bar had to last the whole of the week. You see kids going into the sweet shop today, and they'll buy that same mars bar or even one that's a little bit bigger, and they've eaten it before they've got out of the shop, and I've thought you really don't understand what it was like in years gone by. I think we were better off for it, because although we ate frugally, we had a better quality of food or so it seems. We grew our own vegetables because, my father had got three allotments that kept us going, we'd got chickens down the end of the garden so we had a supply of eggs, so we were self-sufficient to a degree, but over the years, food came off the rationing in the early 1950's and erm, I think we have a tendency these days to take food for granted, and you go to the supermarket, and you buy a ready packed or a ready prepared meal and I don't know whether that's good for you or not. I don't know whether that's good for you.

- 40:36 I Stratford Road now, there are many restaurants, can you remember in the early days whether there were any restaurants?
- 40:50 R I think the plain answer to that is no. I can't remember, because I don't think, at the end of the war and into the 1950's, that I don't think people went out to eat, certainly not in the way that we go out today. With the 60's and 70's came a period when, we were so much better off, and the local fish and chip shops which were around, they still existed, but they started providing seating accommodation inside, so you could eat your fish and chips in the shops and then the restaurant trade started to take off and of course now, we've got such a variety of food, the like of which you wouldn't have dreamt of in those days.
- 42:03 I Can you just tell me a little about how you think your children's and grandchildren's lives are different now to your life.
- 42:16 R Well they've got mod cons, erm just as when Sylvia and I got married, we'd got mod cons available to us that our parents didn't have. I can remember my mum having, getting the first fridge into the kitchen, and that was alongside the old boiler, which all the clothes were washed in, with the tongs and the old wringer, you don't have that nowadays, erm they've got a washing machine, drying machine that seems to do it all in one and they don't even have to put the washing out on the line. So yea I think that the quality of life that our children enjoy now is a lot better in some respects than the quality of life that we had when we were growing up, but whether that's for the better, with current developments in the world at the moment, I sometimes fear for what my grandchildren are going to be faced with, and I've said on a few occasions, a little somewhat fatalistically, that I'm glad I'm this end of my life than my grandkids, but I qualify that by saying that you grow up in the world that you live in, and I'm sure that they will have a form of life totally different to my beginnings, but which they are accustomed to and they will take in their stride, so in a way, yes I do have fears for what they've got, but that's only relevant to the type of life that I've come through.
- 44:44 I Can you tell me your views about modern technology, things like mobile phones?
- 44:54 R Erm well yes they, I mean television, we didn't get television until 1953 with the Coronation, so I grew up, I was fourteen in 1953, so I've come through childhood without television. We had a radio, we had a radio and we'd sit and listen to it, erm, and I've come through a lifetime of technological advancements, and the fact that you can switch television on and get hundreds of channels at the press of a button, is somewhat strange if you consider that in 1953 all you'd got was BBC1, well BBC, black and white. I don't know that some of the technology that's available to us is a good thing, I'm not particularly in favour of mobile phones, you can't seem to get away from them, it don't matter where you are, whether you're shopping in the

supermarket or you're out in the country walking, the thing goes off, and that I don't like, I have to say I don't like, and my grandkids will tell you that it's no good phoning grandpa because he's never got his switched on, but having said, having said that, Sylvia and I have had occasions when we haven't had a landline available and we've needed to communicate, and so I can sit on the other side of the fence and say used properly, they've got benefits, but generally speaking I don't like them, I've got one but I don't use it. The rest of it, you know modern technology, computers, we've come through such a rapid age with computers, internet. I can remember when the bank went onto a computer, we'd got a, we'd got a room full of equipment which punched out a tape which was collected and sent off at the end of the day to be processed, whereas now we take it for granted that you just press a button on the computer and you've got instant communication, wherever and whenever you wanted... And then with the internet I've got reservations about the internet because you've got instant access everywhere and an awful lot of, I think dangerous stuff, comes over the internet, which certainly wasn't available to us when I was growing up, erm, and yet we've all got them. Who would have thought thirty years ago that most houses would have computers, and you've got email, which is another thing, there's a danger with emails in as much that it calls for raising the pace of life, and calls for instant replies, whereas with an ordinary letter coming through the letterbox, you've got some time to stop and think about the answer that you're going to give. The expectation is that an email comes through, and while it's up in front of you, you deal with it and answer it because once it goes over the top of the screen you forget about it, so you know, yes and no. I think some of modern technology is extremely good and I think some of it is harmful, but you'll not stop progress.

49:41 I Money transactions, that has changed over the years.

49:47 R Slightly, slightly erm, I was in the bank when the banks went over to computerisation and, err, they had what was called EFTPOS Electronic Front Transfer of Funds and Point of Service rather, and the thought of how that was going to work was a bit of a puzzle at the time, but we've got that constantly now because you don't need money when you go shopping, you get a card out your pocket, and you make your payment for it and it's debited to your account. There are dangers with that as well because, in the wrong hands, people can get information about you and your finances that they shouldn't have, but on the other hand it's got a lot of advantages in that, you're not carrying loads of money about, and apart from being mugged for a mobile phone, they're not gonna get an awful lot of cash off you out of your pockets which is what you were mugged for years ago, so yes there've been a lot of changes, there've been a lot of changes. I saw the advent of the credit card, good and bad. As I've just said, you don't carry cash about with you, but the credit card companies give the card a limit, and if you're not strong enough then the temptation is to spend up to the limit of the card and then the card company say "*oh you're a good customer you use your card a lot, we*

*will increase your limit a bit further up”* and then people take that up and then all of a sudden, the weaker people, if that’s a correct expression, find themselves thousands of pounds in debt without the means of repaying it, so credit cards are beneficial in the right hands, but can be a danger because of the temptation to spend money you haven’t got.

52:25 I What are your plans for the future?

52:29 R Well I'm at the back end of my life now, I'm seventy five in a week's time. I suppose there isn't an awful lot left, but seriously, hopefully that I shall have the health to continue enjoying it, erm, I want to travel the way that I've travelled before. I want to see my grandkids married and settled, hopefully in the similar sort of happy relationship that Sylvia and I have enjoyed, and yea just generally see out what's left with the health to enjoy it. I've got no particular ambitions, just from the anno domini point of view.

53:37 I Is there something that I haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

53:46 R Oh blimey, I shouldn't have said that should I (***giggle***). No I don't think so, I think we've covered most things. I consider that I've been extremely fortunate. I'm coming up, what, 1966, so for forty eight years Sylvia and I have been married, yea we do have our differences, no couple don't, but we've had, well I have had a happy relationship and a happy marriage. I think that is related in the relationship that we've got with our children and our grandchildren, and I consider that I must have done something right along the road because, even now, the family and the grandchildren still want to come away with us, and when you think of the problems that a lot of families have where the children are only too glad to get away, it must show some credit, on Sylvia and myself so you know, yea I'm satisfied with what life surrounds me.

55:22 I Thank you very much Mr Fry.

55:25 R Thank you.